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ABSTRACT

Adult participation in education in the United Kingdom in 1999 was examined in a survey during which a sample of 5,054 adults over the age of 17 (2,366 men and 2,688 women) throughout the United Kingdom were interviewed. The following were among the major findings: (1) 23% of adults enrolled in courses were taking computer courses; (2) the rate of participation in education among retired persons decreased from 20% in 1996 to 16% in 1999; (3) the rate of participation among part-time workers increased from 19% to 29% in the same 3 years; (4) the rate of adult participation in education in Wales is 28% (versus the national average of 22%); (5) of all areas of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has the lowest rate of adult participation; (6) social class, age, and length of initial education all continue to have powerful effects on adults' participation in education, with older people being less likely to participate than their younger counterparts; and (7) 76% of those interviewed said that they will likely take another course, whereas 87% of those who have not participated in education since leaving school say that they are unlikely to do so in the future. Twelve tables/figures are included. (MN)

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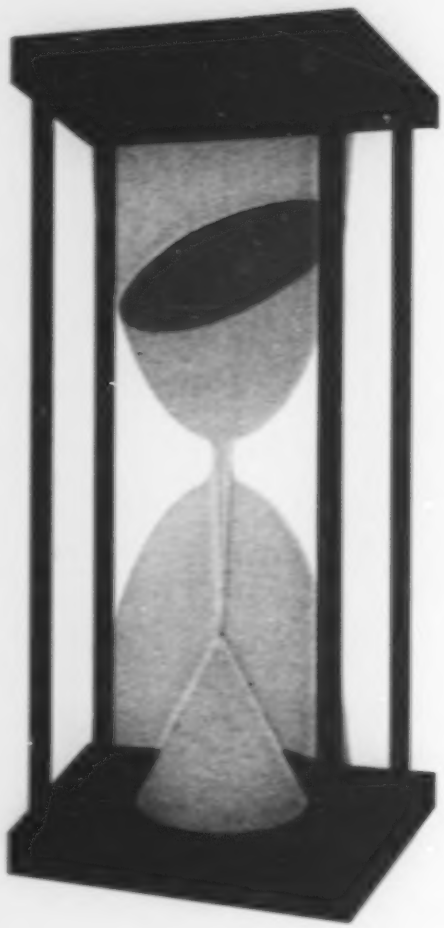

The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 1999

Alan Tuckett
and
Naomi Sargant

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Marking Time

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Alan Tuckett and Naomi Sargant

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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Contents

Headline findings	5
Participation	7
Future intentions	8
Participation – regions/nations	9
Age and participation	11
Social class	12
Participation and employment	14
Terminal age of education	15
What people study	16
Where people go for advice	18
Other findings	20

Headline findings

Headline results of the 1999 NIACE adult learning survey show that the Learning Society is still a distant dream. It shows that the measures being put in place by the Government to widen participation and address barriers to learning throughout life have not yet had time to impact on overall participation.

The survey commissioned to coincide with Adult Learners' Week 1999 interviewed 5054 adults over the age of 17 throughout the UK, between 27 January and 14 February this year, with a boosted sample of 483 adults in Wales using the same questions as in 1996. The fieldwork for the 1999 survey was carried out by RSGB (Research Surveys of Great Britain).

The survey shows that there has been no overall change in the numbers of people currently or recently learning since the last NIACE survey in 1996. Within the overall picture of no change there are, however, marked shifts in participation.

- Computer studies is the main subject of study for almost one in four adults (23%, up from 17% in 1996)

- There has been a 20% fall in participation by retired people over the last 3 years from 12% to 9% among current learners, and from 20% to 16% among current/recent learners

- There has been a dramatic increase in participation among part-time workers up from 19% to 29% currently learning, (42% to 50% among those recent learning)

- Wales has become the leading site of learning in the UK, with 28% currently learning, against a national figure of 22%, and 43% studying in the last 3 years

- Scotland has seen a drop from 21% to 18% among current learners, and from 38% to 33% among recent learners in the last 3 years

- There has been an increase in participation in Northern Ireland, but fewer people have participated in the last 3 years in the province than anywhere else in the UK

- In England, East Anglia and the East Midlands are top of the participation league, with the West Midlands and the North at the bottom

- Social class, age, and the length of initial education all continue to show a powerful effect on adults' participation

- The more you get, the more you want:

  76% of current learners say they are likely to take up learning again

  but 87% of people who say they have done no learning since school are unlikely to do so in the future

- The NIACE questions are included on RSGB's national surveys. They are designed to show the extent to which adults identify themselves as learners – a key requirement of the learning society

- **NIACE has undertaken regular surveys of adult participation for 20 years. A parallel sequence of surveys – the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) – based on extensive individual interview produces data consistently showing higher levels of participation. However, when learning incidents of less than 10 hours are stripped out from the NALS figures, the data is broadly the same**

- This survey has been produced with the support of the European Social Fund.

Alan Tuckett
Naomi Sargant

May 1999

Participation

- The survey shows almost 1 in 4 are currently learning
- 2 in 5 have been learning in the last 3 years
- More men than women participate in learning but the gap is narrowing.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, men and women compared			
	total	**men**	**women**
base – all respondents = 100%	5054	2366	2688
current learning	22	24	21
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	18	18	19
all current/recent learning	40	41	40
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	23	25	21
none since leaving full-time education	37	34	40

TABLE 2: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, 1996-1999, men and women compared						
	total		**men**		**women**	
	1996	**1999**	**1996**	**1999**	**1996**	**1999**
base – all respondents = 100%	4673	5054	2270	2366	2403	2688
current learning	23	22	25	24	21	21
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	17	18	18	18	17	19
all current/recent learning	40	40	43	41	38	40
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	23	23	25	25	21	21
none since leaving full-time education	36	37	31	34	41	40

Future intentions

- People studying currently expect to do more learning in the future
- Almost 9 in 10 of the people who have done no learning since school are unlikely to do so in the future (87% against 81% in 1996).

TABLE 3: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by gender and learning status

	total	men	women	current learners	recent learners	past learners	none since full-time
base-all respondents = 100%	5054	2366	2688	1125	919	1148	1815
very likely	22	22	21	59	30	8	4
fairly likely	16	15	17	18	30	17	8
total likely	38	38	38	76	60	25	12
fairly unlikely	12	14	11	8	15	19	10
very unlikely	47	46	48	12	22	54	77
total unlikely	59	59	59	20	37	72	87
don't know	3	3	3	4	4	2	2

Participation – regions/nations

- Where people live has a big impact on what proportion is likely to learn
- Wales has the highest numbers currently learning, and the highest number planning to learn in the future
- There are as many learners in the countryside as in urban Britain.

TABLE 4: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by nation of the UK and rural/urban residence

	total	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	rural	urban
base – all respondents = 100%	5054	4217	143	442	252	853	4202
current learning	22	23	17	18	28	23	22
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	18	19	15	16	15	18	18
all current/recent learning	40	41	32	33	43	41	40
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	23	23	23	24	23	24	23
none since leaving full-time education	37	36	45	43	34	35	37

Table 5: PARTICIPATION BY REGION/NATION, in percentages

base: total sample 100%

current/recent participation		**future intentions**			
		likely		**unlikely**	
East Anglia	48	**Wales**	**46**	**Northern Ireland**	**69**
East Midlands	48	East Midlands	43	**Scotland**	**64**
London	46	London	43	Yorkshire and Humberside	64
Wales	**43**	East Anglia	41	South West	63
South East	42	North West	39	West Midlands	62
Yorkshire and Humberside	42	**England**	**38**	North	60
England	**41**	South East	38	**England**	**59**
North West	41	**UK**	**38**	North West	59
UK	**40**	North	37	**UK**	**59**
South West	37	West Midlands	36	East Anglia	58
West Midlands	34	Yorkshire and Humberside	35	South East	58
North	34	**Scotland**	**33**	East Midlands	53
Scotland	**33**	South West	33	London	53
Northern Ireland	**32**	**Northern Ireland**	**28**	**Wales**	**51**

Age and participation

- There has been a marked fall in participation among older people since 1996
- There has also been a small drop in 17-19 participation – likely to be affected by the rise in young people leaving education for jobs
- All other groups have seen a rise in participation
- Overall, the older people are, the less likely they are to participate in learning.

TABLE 6: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION, by age, 1996 and 1999 compared		
	1996	**1999**
All	**40**	**40**
17-19	86	81
20-24	65	70
25-35	48	50
35-44	43	47
45-54	36	41
55-64	25	30
65-74	19	16
75+	15	9

Social class

- The Learning Divide persists – almost twice as many professional and managerial workers (ABs – 33%) and white-collar workers (Cls – 32%) as skilled manual workers (C2s –17%) are currently studying

- Three in four of the least skilled (DEs) have done no learning in the last 3 years and 7 in 10 of them say they are unlikely to study in the future.

TABLE 7: CURRENT/RECENT LEARNING, by social class, 1996 and 1999 compared

	proportion which are current/recent learners	
	1996	**1999**
total sample	40	40
AB	53	58
C1	52	51
C2	33	36
DE	26	24

NB: percentages are of the horizontal group and the proportions include full-time students

TABLE 8: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by social class					
	total	**AB**	**C1**	**C2**	**DE**
base - all respondents = 100%	5054	914	1398	1121	1620
very likely	22	31	28	18	14
fairly likely	16	19	18	16	13
total likely	38	50	46	34	27
fairly unlikely	12	14	14	14	9
very unlikely	47	34	38	48	61
total unlikely	59	48	52	62	70
don't know	3	2	3	3	3

Participation and employment

- People at work are more likely to be actively learning
- Current participation among part-time workers is up from 19% to 29%
- Part-time workers participated at the same level as full-time over the 3 years mapped
- 4 in 10 of unemployed people have participated recently, but only 3 in 10 of other unwaged adults, and 16% of retired people.

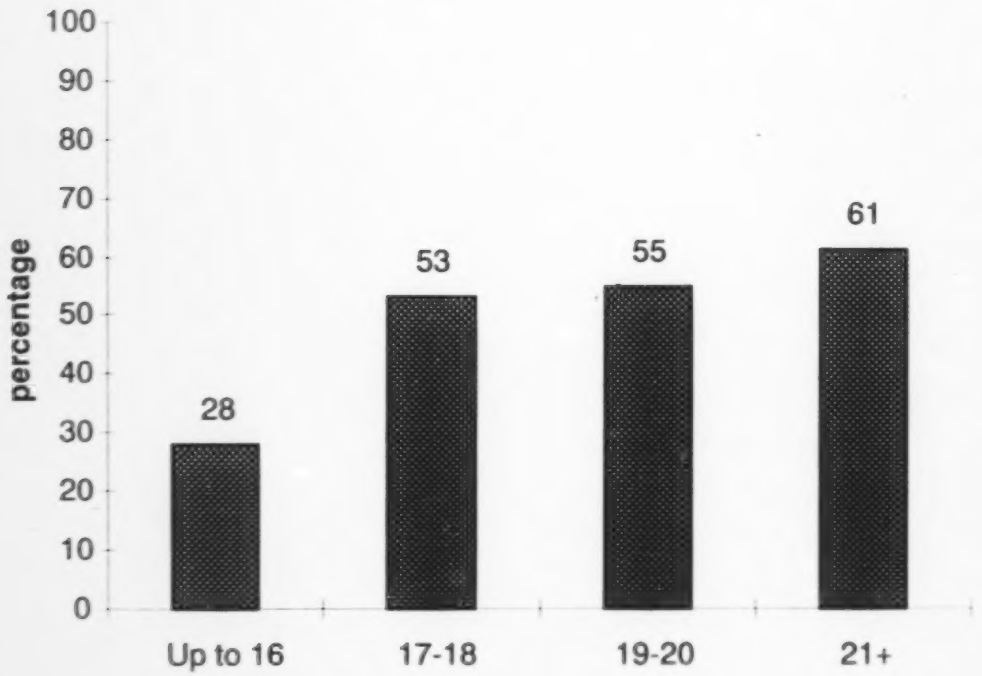
TABLE 9: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by employment status

	total	full time	part time	unemployed	not working	retired	student
base – all respondents =100%	5054	1957	617	249	749	1273	209
current learning	22	26	29	14	14	9	95
recent learning	18	26	21	27	16	7	1
all current/recent learning	40	51	50	41	30	16	97
past learning	23	22	20	19	22	30	-
none since leaving full-time education	37	37	30	40	48	54	3

Terminal age of education

- The age at which people leave school continues to have a dramatic impact on current or future learning
- People who stay beyond 16 are almost twice as likely to be back to learning later in life.

Figure 1: current/recent participation in learning by terminal age of education



What people study

Vocational subjects dominate people's main choices of areas to study with the list headed by:

- computer studies 25%
- business and management 10%
- nursing/health studies 10%
- other vocational qualifications 9%

Computer studies continues to increase (8% in 1990, 17% in 1996 and 25% in 1999) and is the main subject of study for 25-74 year olds. For younger people business and management, and for learners over 75 foreign languages, top the list.

TABLE 10: ALL SUBJECTS OF CURRENT/RECENT STUDY, rating 4% or over by age									
	total	**17-19**	**20-24**	**25-34**	**35-44**	**45-54**	**55-64**	**65-74**	**75+**
base – all current/recent learners = 100%	2044	191	244	488	432	350	202	104	33
computer studies	25	14	14	24	29	33	31	21	7
business/ management	10	19	17	11	8	8	5	*	-
nursing/ health studies	10	8	6	10	10	11	10	8	4
foreign languages	7	8	3	4	6	8	9	15	27
other academic subjects	7	10	10	7	6	8	6	5	3
creative arts including photography	6	10	7	4	6	5	-	14	12
social sciences work/services/ community care	6	8	9	6	5	4	5	3	9
science/maths/ statistics	5	13	10	3	4	2	3	3	-
Engineering	4	3	4	7	4	3	3	1	-
English literature	4	1	5	3	3	3	2	2	4
other vocational qualifications	9	8	5	9	13	10	8	*	10
other leisure subjects	7	11	5	4	5	8	11	13	6
other professional qualifications	7	3	8	9	8	6	4	4	4

Where people go for advice

- The key sources of information and advice vary with age
- The workplace is the most common source of advice for men
- Women's sources are more varied and informal, though work remains the main source of advice
- For 17-19s, school is the main source of information
- For 20-24s, colleges and universities
- For 25-64, workplace trainers/employers
- Over 55, friends and family play an increasingly important role
- Newspapers, libraries and adult education centres are important to older people.

TABLE 11: SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MAIN CURRENT/RECENT LEARNING

				age							
	total	male	female	17-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
base – all current/recent learners = 100%	2044	980	1064	191	244	488	432	350	202	104	33
work/employer/ training officer	25	28	21	4	15	34	28	33	25	5	4
FE/technical college	13	11	15	33	24	13	10	6	5	11	4
friends/family	12	12	13	10	15	11	10	11	15	24	31
university/ college of higher education	8	8	8	9	21	8	5	7	3	3	6
workmates	7	8	5	4	3	7	12	6	4	2	5
school	6	5	7	36	10	4	2	2	3	1	4
newspaper adverts	6	5	7	1	3	6	8	6	8	15	6
adult education centre/evening institute	3	2	3	-	1	2	3	4	5	3	15
printed publicity delivered to home	3	2	3	1	2	4	3	2	4	4	-
printed publicity elsewhere	3	2	4	-	3	3	5	2	1	4	5
library	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	1	3	5	11
job centre	2	3	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	-	-
trade union/ professional associates	2	2	1	-	*	1	3	3	3	-	-
careers service/ guidance service	2	1	2	8	2	1	2	-	1	-	-

Other findings

- 47% of reasons for learning are work-related
- 35% of reasons relate to personal development
- 11% of reasons are to gain educational qualifications/progression
- 56% of learners have been studying their subject for more than a year (59% for men, 53% for women)
- 85% of people in full-time work hold educational qualifications

As do:

- 75% of people in part-time work
- 72% of unemployed people
- 63% of other unwaged adults
- Men (19%) are still more likely to get help than women (13%) for fees for outside courses
- Employers help far more full-time (27%) than part-time workers (13%) with fees
- Cost is a major barrier to participation for fewer learners than three years ago (7% against 10%)
- Pressures of work for people of working age, and the belief among older people that they are too old or ill to benefit, remain major barriers to joining in
- A full study will be published later this year.

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Alan Tuckett and Naomi Sargant

Marking Time shows that the Learning Society is still a distant dream. It shows that measures being put in place by the Government to widen participation and address barriers to learning throughout life have not yet had time to impact on overall participation.

Launched during Adult Learners' Week 1999, *Marking Time* builds on NIACE's previous survey of participation in adult learning (*The Learning Divide*, Sargant *et al*, 1997, NIACE, ISBN 1 86201 016 1, £20.00). The findings presented here are based on a survey which will be published in full later in 1999.

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